



AN ASSOCIATION OF
MONTANA HEALTH
CARE PROVIDERS

27 22
EXHIBIT ~~1925~~
DATE Jan 27, 09
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**Testimony to the Appropriations Joint Human Services Subcommittee
Pertaining to Senior and Long Term Care Services**

MHA, An Association of Montana Health Care Providers represents the interests of our member long term care providers, including nursing facilities, home health agencies and hospice organizations. MHA members urge your consideration of fully funding the Montana Medicaid program.

Protect the Base

Our primary objective during this tough economic climate is to maintain the current base funding for long term care services. State commitment to the service providers and the Medicaid program beneficiaries is crucial. As the economy worsens low income Montanans become more dependent on the safety net providers, and require state assistance to meet their basic health needs.

A second concern about funding cuts is that once the base budget is reduced it can take several years to come back to current level funding. In years past when state funding was short nursing homes agreed to a provider tax to help fund Medicaid. That tax now provides more than \$16 million per year. Nursing homes agreed to the tax with the understanding that the state would continue its funding commitment for the nursing home program.

Medicaid Provider Rate Adjustments

MHA urges the legislature to provide an annual 3.5% rate hike for long term services, an amount that is consistent with current inflationary trends. While state funding is scarce, the long term care providers are heavily dependent on Medicaid for their revenue stream. Frankly, there are few options to boost revenues to make up any Medicaid shortfalls.

A nursing home typically has more than 60% of its residents covered by Medicaid. Another 7 – 10% of the residents might be covered by Medicare. That leaves a third of the resident population to bear the full impact of increased costs. There are no proposals to reduce quality, nor are there proposals to alleviate the burdens of regulation.

Increasing the Medicaid rate is the only reasonable option to fund the treatment needs for the Medicaid beneficiaries.

Intergovernmental Transfer Program

The Department proposes to continue the IGT program to help fund nursing facility and other senior health programs. The IGT program provides an important funding source for all nursing facilities and for other long term care services. MHA urges your continued support for the current IGT program.

Home and Community Based Waiver Expansion

MHA has long supported the home and community based waiver program. We have supported every expansion proposed by the Department. We are pleased to see an additional expansion is proposed for this biennium.

The waiver program provides seniors and other beneficiaries an option to receive their care in their homes. The program also provides an important option for hospitals that must discharge patients that require ongoing medical care, but are not accepted by nursing facilities or other treatment settings.

There is a waiting list for the program. MHA supports expanding the waiver.

Direct Care Wage Add-on

The legislature has, over the past few years, provided money earmarked for wage hikes for direct care staff. MHA has supported those efforts as health care providers face a continued shortage of qualified workers, and competition from other employers that offer comparable wages but a less demanding work environment. MHA will support any effort to continue funding direct care staff wages. However, MHA prefers that this earmarked funding come only after funding general inflation through a rate hike.

Where Does the Money Come From?

MHA's recommendations for the Medicaid program, including the Senior and Long Term Care Division, the Health Resources Division and the Addictive and Mental Disease Division programs, all require funds beyond the Governor's budget request. In the past several years we have worked to provide the funding sources for the legislature in the form of the IGT program, provider use fees and tobacco settlement and tax funds. We did so because this State faced persistent shortfalls in needed general funds.

The alternative funding has gone a long way to bolster the Medicaid program and relieve the pressure on the general fund. We now face some limits on those alternative funds. MHA recommends that the Committee consider the following funding sources for the Medicaid program:

- Retain any general fund savings from lower than projected utilization of nursing home and other Medicaid services in the base budget.
- Utilize any surplus I-149 tobacco funds that could be used to continue to the current wage add-on, and could be tapped to provide current spending. MHA believes that, while sustainability in future years is an issue, using these funds is consistent with the intent of the statute;
- While program expansion is a worthy goal, when adequate funds are not available the Committee may consider delaying program expansion while current program needs are funded;

- MHA would not object to a modest increase in the taxes assessed on alcohol. The state expends a considerable amount of its budget to fund treatment and other social services related to alcohol and drug abuse. It seems reasonable to suggest additional revenues from this source; and

Thank you for the opportunity to share our comments with this Committee.

Jan 22, 2009

EXHIBIT 24
DATE 1-27-09
HB 2

To Whom it may Concern;

My husband and I receive Home
Delivered Meals from The Senior
Center in Polson, MT.

I am disabled and my husband isn't
able to fix the nutritious meals
we receive.

Sincerely
Poni Balock

We are ages 79 yrs and 81 years.

Jan 23, 09

EXHIBIT 24
DATE 1-27-09
HB 2

Polson Senior Citizens
504 3rd Ave, E
Polson, Montana
59860

Duane - Area Agency

Myrtle and I have great difficulty, due to limited mobility; when the procurement and preparation of food is concerned.

This service allows us to remain in our home, where we can provide for each other, with the basic needs that come with our advanced age.

We thank you for making this service available to us.
Leo & Myrtle Schroeder
Myrtle Schroeder
D. Schroeder

January 22, 2009

Dear Home Delivered Clients,

I received a e-mail from Duane from Area Agency about the State Funding for the Seniors of Lake County. He asked for letters from Senior whose lives have been changed through receiving Home Delivered meals. If you could write a letter stating the fact of your situation and how the services received assisted you to stay at home and continue a productive life.

If the meals help you for a short time after a illness or if the meals were a help in any other way.

I know this is short notice, but if you could do this today(Thursday) and give the letter back to Dave on Friday it would really help us over in Helena when they are requesting money before the Joint Finance Committee.

Thanks,



Jo Durand
Nutrition Director

I James Fleming #
I have had heart surgery + just had toe
surgery, I have been Destitute before
I could not do with out meal on weeks
~~and home care~~ and I have an assist to
make my bed and cook + clean

James Fleming #

January 22, 2009

Dear Jo Duwand - Nutrition Director

Yes - The home delivered meals are wonderful for me.

1. Since I don't drive it is less work for my son who does all my driving either taking me or taking the grocery list I give him. It is much easier to just pay the driver of the meals on wheels. So - makes me feel more independent.

2. It is always a pleasure to get to know the drivers who deliver the meals - living alone gets lonesome especially if you are a newcomer to the community. I came from North Dakota so I could live near 2 of my sons here in Polson.

3. I never did like to cook! The cook here in Polson is a much better cook. All the meals are good - well balanced and enjoyable.

4. Considering the cost of food plus the cost of gas to go to the grocery store - meals on wheels is a bargain as it is at present.

5. I'm 90 years old so getting a good meal at noon makes it possible for me to continue to live alone in my own apartment instead of an assisted living or nursing home.

Sincerely -
Burnette Guthrie



Burnette Guthrie
Apt. 4
102 Kootenai Ave.
Polson, MT 59860

Area Agency for
State Funding for
Seniors of Lake County,

The mealson wheels have been
a very big help in helping me
stay at home.
I've had hip and knee replacements,
broken toes all on the left plus an
18" long tumor same leg. I have over-
used my right leg to the extent it's
in bad shape.

Doctor said it is the first 3
vertebrae in my spine that is
disintegrating.

Sincerely

Lynn Weranbauer
505 6th Ave. E.
Polson, MT. 59860

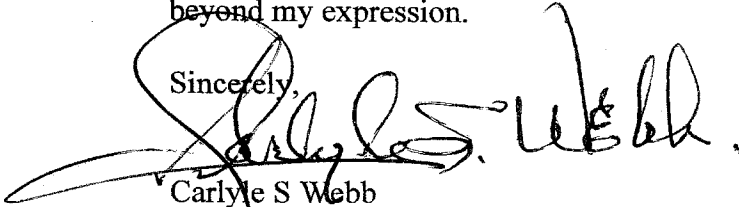
EXHIBIT 24
DATE 1-27-09
HB 2

January 22, 2009

Dear Duane,

My wife Doris had a stroke Nov. 6, 2006, I requested and have received MOW's since, delivered by the Polson Senior Center. It is difficult to express my gratitude and thanks for this kind service to be available, for even though she is barely mobile, does not write, speaks poorly, and reads, but cannot tell you what she read, the service is appreciated beyond my expression.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Carlyle S. Webb", with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Carlyle S Webb
807 4th Ave E
Polson, MT 59860

January 19, 2009

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Health & Human Services Subcommittee,

The services and support provided by the Council on Aging programs in Montana are vital to our senior's ability to maintain their independence and dignity. Without adequate support our elderly will be seeking more costly services through emergency rooms, hospitals, and nursing homes.

Council on Aging programs assist in providing for the essential needs of our fragile elderly:

- * Nutritional needs through Meals on Wheels, congregate meals at Senior Centers, and commodities;
- * Transportation services to assist with medical appointments and shopping;
- * Homemaker services to maintain a livable environment;
- * Assistance & support with signing up for medication plans, filing taxes, conversion to digital TV, arranging legal guidance, etc.
- * Loan closet for Durable Medical Equipment such as wheelchairs, walkers, etc.
- * Elderly Ombudsman services;
- * And a key resource for elderly to contact for direction and referral for an unlimited variety of questions or issues.

Reducing funding now will only increase the cost to the system over time. We must ensure these programs have the financial support they need to continue to provide the support needed by our growing elderly population. The economic environment results in an increased need for those elderly on fixed or decreasing incomes; now is not the time to reduce funding. Funding should be increasing as our elderly population increases and the economy worsens the financial status of those on fixed or decreasing incomes.

As a social worker for hospice in our community, I feel certain cuts to this vital program will negatively affect the seniors in our communities.

Please ensure that Council on Aging programs across the state continue to receive the financial support they need to provide essential services to our fragile elderly.

Thank you for considering these needs; I appreciate your vigilance in fiscal matters.

Sincerely,



Cathleen J. Palmer, L.C.P.C.

EXHIBIT 24 ~~24~~
DATE Jan 27, 09
HB 2

1/22/09

My mother has been receiving Home Delivered meals for 8 years and she totally depends on them. She is unable to drive or shop. Her stove has been disconnected because she can not safely operate it. She is able to use a microwave.

By receiving Home Delivered meals she is able to keep her independence, live at home and not be institutionalized. In addition she is getting a nutritional and balanced diet and does not miss meals. The delivery person also provides a check that she is up and going and has not fallen or otherwise injured herself.

Home Delivered meals is very valuable to many seniors who would other wise need to be institutionalized or cared for in other very expensive ways. I don't know how I would care for my mother without this service.

Sincerely,

Shirley Laisy

Shirley Laisy
41621 Sunny Slope Drive
Polson, Montana 59860